

Emotional Intelligence & Self-Regulation



A Guide to Helping our Loved Ones
Manage Their Strong Negative Emotions

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Introduction

This document is the condensed summary of many years of studies, readings and contemplations, as well as [Lise Villeneuve's](#) personal experience as a mother, teacher, author and counselor. It is the answer to this question:

What is the most direct and effective way to help ourselves and others experience a genuine state of predominantly positive emotions?

The question might sound naïve, too simplistic or unrealistic, but you will soon discover the depth that is required to fully understand the proposed conclusion. We all want to experience well-being and joy, but too often, we think we can get there by ignoring or suppressing negative emotions, or simply by thinking positively. This mistake is rooted in a global, societal attitude that has been engrained in us for millennia. Thankfully, a paradigm shift is slowly under way, thanks to open-minded people like you.



My Personal Experience: Compliance versus Authenticity

I recently got flashed back to when our daughter came home from public school - when she was just nine years old. Very often, she would walk in the door, immediately run to her room, slam the door and be in a mood until supper time. Our son Théo often did the same thing when I picked him up from preschool. When he got home, he needed to vent all that stress and pent-up frustration he had accumulated during the day. It was only at home that he finally felt comfortable enough to let it out -thankfully. Like Emma and Théo, many kids are obedient and they are eager to please their teachers or parents - but this doesn't mean they don't feel stressed

out at times or are immune to experiencing strong negative emotions. In fact, the best behaved kids are probably more likely to repress and suppress their negative feelings in order to comply. All emotions that are not acknowledged, expressed or neutralised remain stuck in our bodies and can lead to physical illness. Also, studies have shown that stress and negative emotions are detrimental to learning. Wouldn't it be extremely helpful to give our children and students some tools, strategies and even a little physical space to help them cope with their negative emotions?

Most adults don't know how to manage their negative feelings, so it's not surprising that kids have no clue how to deal with (socially unacceptable) negative emotions when these come up in a public place like school. Like my kids, many children have only one option if they want to be 'good' and not disrupt the class: they are forced to ignore their negative emotions, so they repress them and let the pressure build up inside... until they get home. Many adults have to do the same thing at work.

Let's shed some light on this topic by covering five essential facts about emotions.

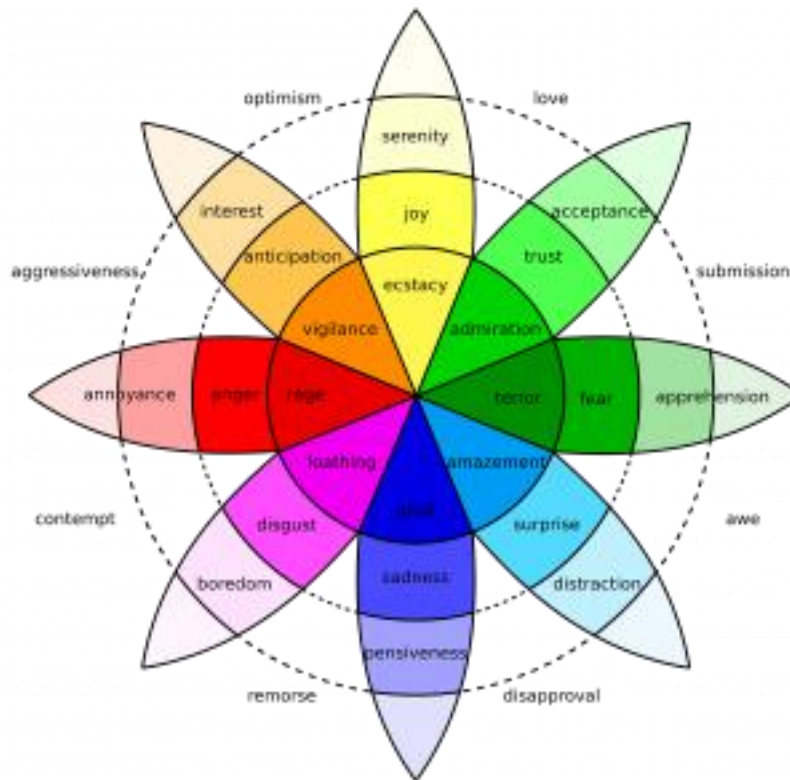


Part one:

Five Essential Facts about Emotions

Most of us have been conditioned to love and value our positive emotions, but we avoid our negative emotions like the plague! We run away from them, we hide them from ourselves, we project them onto other people, and we even feel ashamed or guilty when these negative emotions catch up with us. Why are we so afraid of our negative emotions? We're only human, and that means we get to experience the full spectrum of emotions: positive and negative.

Below is Robert Plutchik's wheel of emotions.



I have summarized the five most essential facts about emotions:

1. **All our emotions are valid, acceptable and important** -especially the negative ones! They are not "wrong" and nobody should feel guilty or ashamed about the way they feel. Remember that our feelings and our behaviours are two different things. You can correct behaviours without shaming the feelings behind them.



2. **Emotions are at the heart of our internal guidance system.** Feelings create thousands of thoughts, and these thoughts then generate more feelings and emotions. It's a self-perpetuating cycle. Our emotions are directly transferred and felt in our body. Positive emotions will make us feel good, relaxed, open, energized and inspired, whereas negative emotions will make us feel tense, constricted, closed, lethargic, sluggish and drained. So by paying attention to the way you feel in your body, (open or closed, good or bad) you'll always know if you're in a positive or negative emotional state. How do you feel now?



3. The emotional states we experience are not random at all. Emotions have been classified in a scale of emotions, from the lowest states to the highest. It's very difficult to make a sudden jump from the lower levels (such as depression) directly to the highest levels (such as optimism or joy), or the other way around. Our emotional states fluctuate during the day, gradually moving up or down the scale. Here's the good news! We can change how we feel with our thoughts, our actions and our focus. To do this, we just need to reach for a better-feeling thought, or an action that will bring us joy. Try it now. Think about something that makes you smile. Breathe in that feeling. You have just moved yourself up one notch on the scale of emotions! It's very simple. If we learn to pay attention to how we're feeling in our body at any given moment –and we do our best to keep ourselves up in the more positive range of emotions on the scale, we won't suddenly be ambushed by strong negative feelings. However, when the negative emotions do show up, that's ok! They serve a very important purpose and they should not be ignored.

Scale of Emotions

| | |
|---|--|
| ↑ | 1. Joy / Knowledge/ Empowerment/ Freedom / Love / Appreciation |
| | 2. Passion |
| | 3. Enthusiasm/ Eagerness / Happiness |
| | 4. Positive Expectation / Belief |
| | 5. Optimism |
| | 6. Hopefulness |
| | 7. Contentment |
| | 8. Boredom |
| ↑ | 9. Pessimism |
| | 10. Frustration / Irritation / Impatience |
| | 11. Feeling Overwhelmed |
| | 12. Disappointment |
| | 13. Doubt |
| | 14. Worry |
| | 15. Blame |
| | 16. Discouragement |
| ↑ | 17. Anger |
| | 18. Revenge |
| | 19. Hatred / Rage |
| | 20. Jealousy |
| | 21. Insecurity / Guilt / Unworthiness |
| | 22. Fear / Grief / Depression / Despair / Powerlessness |

See also Dr. David Hawkins' [Scale of Consciousness](#) as explained in this brief video.

4. **Negative emotions tell us when we're off track**, or out of alignment with the wisdom of our higher-Selves. Negative emotions are like a wake-up call. They are telling us that we are now quite low on the scale of emotions and it would be wise to slowly climb back up by either changing our actions or our thoughts. It's also possible that some old unresolved emotions have been stirred up again. If that's the case, we can decide if we'd like to work on releasing those suppressed emotions, or if the timing is not appropriate, we can shift our focus to better-feeling thoughts or actions and come back to these at a later time.



5. **Everyone experiences negative emotions sooner or later, but we don't have to stay stuck in negativity.** Beware! Negativity can be highly addictive and contagious, so you don't want to dwell there. It's addictive because it offers a secret, pleasurable payoff to the ego. Unchecked, it will quickly pick up momentum and generate more negativity. Remember: the purpose of negative emotions is to make us aware that we are heading in the wrong direction, or that something needs to be released if we want to move forward and feel good again. Once we have gotten the message and made the appropriate changes, we can start to move back up the scale of emotions to a better-feeling state. Sometimes –like in the case of grief, or severe depression, the healing process can take some time, so we have to be patient with ourselves. Having an attitude of surrender and acceptance of whatever feelings we are experiencing accelerates the process. If we resist our negative feelings, we can't heal them, because we're just trying to escape. Instead, these feelings have to be willingly released. I will be giving more details about releasing negative feelings in the following sections.



In short:

- 1) All our emotions are valid, acceptable and important, especially the negative ones!
- 2) To instantly have a good idea of where you are on the scale of emotions, simply notice how you are feeling in your body. Feeling good / open means you are experiencing positive emotions (#7 and up on the scale), feeling any kind of tension or resistance means you are experiencing negative emotions (#8 and down on the scale).
- 3) Everyone can learn to move themselves up the scale of emotions by choosing better-feeling thoughts or actions, or by releasing pent-up emotions.
- 4) Don't try to escape or ignore negative emotions, even if they are often inconvenient and uncomfortable. They are sending you an important message. Make the appropriate changes and move on.
- 5) Don't get sucked in. Negativity is highly addictive and contagious, so don't dwell there too long. Be aware of the secret pleasurable payoff our egos get from negativity. Nevertheless, it feels much better to be in a state of joy and peace. Anyone can get there. It just takes a little will and courage.



Part Two:

Helping Our Loved Ones Through an Emotional Storm

It's Not What You Think!

Understanding and practising the five essential points about emotions we just covered will already bring us a huge sense of empowerment and well-being. It's important to educate ourselves - and especially our children about emotional literacy, because many would-be emotional outbursts can be prevented simply by applying these five life-changing principles. As radical as this might sound to many, we have much more control over the way we feel than we might think. Emotional resilience and self-regulation are skills that can be learned and perfected. When we have the courage to work through our emotions consciously, the end result is invulnerability and imperturbability. These are definitely enviable assets in such a volatile and unpredictable world.

What can we do?

This next section is all about helping our loved ones through their tough emotions. How can we help them prevent outbursts? What is the true cause of an emotional crisis? When a storm hits, what can we do to make it easier for them? What attitudes should we adopt? What is going on internally and externally?



1. Teach and Practice Prevention First

If we can increase our awareness of where we find ourselves on the scale of emotions at any given moment - and we learn how to catch ourselves when we are headed towards a negative spiral - we can adjust our thoughts and actions accordingly and maybe even avoid a crisis. The key is to practice this technique when we are feeling calm and centered, or when we are not completely emotionally overwhelmed. If we get to that point of overwhelm, then it's often too late to turn things around and avoid a crash because the negative emotions have built up too much momentum. So when it's too late for prevention, or when life unexpectedly hits us or our loved ones with a major challenge, what's the best way to deal with an emotional storm?

2. Understand the Real Cause

It's crucial to understand the real cause behind any emotional upset. This will probably surprise and maybe even shock a few people. You have been warned! The ego will not like this one bit. It will strongly resist, but try to keep an open mind. As surprising as this may sound, the true source, or cause, of all our feelings (positive and negative) is always internal and not external. In other words, people or circumstances can't *make us* feel anything unless those emotions are already present inside us. This is best explained by the brilliant psychiatrist Dr. David Hawkins, who wrote:

"The rationalizing mind prefers to keep the true causes of emotions out of awareness and utilizes the mechanism of projection to do this. It blames events or other people for "causing" a feeling and views itself as the helpless innocent victim of external causes. "They made me angry." "He got me upset." "It scared me." "World events are the cause of my anxiety." Actually, it's the exact opposite. The suppressed and repressed feelings seek an outlet and utilize the events as triggers and excuses to vent themselves. We are like pressure-cookers ready to release steam when the opportunity arises. Our triggers are set and ready to go off. In psychiatry, this mechanism is

called displacement. It is because we are angry that events "make" us angry. If, through constant surrendering, we have let go of the pent-up store of anger, it is very difficult and, in fact, even impossible for anyone or any situation to "make" us angry. The same, therefore, goes for all other negative feelings once they have been surrendered."



What happens in the case of an emotional crisis is that a trigger (often external) taps into a major area of suppressed or repressed (unconscious) feelings. This can create a sense of overload to the conscious mind. Strong emotions, accompanied by irrational behaviours sometimes follow.



3. Address the Internal Problem First

What does this mean? It means that we have to own our feelings. It means that we are 100% responsible for the way we feel inside, and there is no point in blaming anyone or anything. However, this does not mean that we have to fully agree and accept everything. We are free to speak up, to act and to fix the problems "out there", but we will have much greater power to do so if we fix our emotional wounds "in here" first. We can firmly demand change without being stuck and blinded by our own anger, rage, or hatred. Once we understand this for ourselves, we can help our loved ones untangle their internal and external issues. Let me explain...

If our child or our friend feels intense emotional discomfort, there are likely two factors to consider, or two facets to work on simultaneously: the possible *external triggers* - or problems they have to deal with (a bully, a break up, getting fired...etc) and their *internal emotional state* (fear, low self-esteem, anxiety...etc). There are really two issues going on: their internal pain, and the trigger, or the external problem. We are conditioned to believe that the problem has caused the internal emotional pain, but remember that it has only aggravated it, not caused it. You might be able to work through the internal and external issues simultaneously, but the first priority should be to acknowledge and validate the feelings your loved one is experiencing, then allow them to calm down. Help them verbally express what they are feeling. You can say something like "I can see that you are feeling some_____ and this must be difficult for you. Take a minute to breathe, calm down, and then we'll talk about it."



4. Remember, It's Not About You

The first question to ask ourselves when a loved one is having an emotional outburst is "do I really want to help my child / student / friend, or do I want to be right and appear to be in control?" At first, the answer might seem obvious, but beware! Strong negative emotions are highly contagious and if you're not anchored in awareness right from the start, your ego might begin to take things personally and feel threatened. You don't want to get triggered too, because that will complicate the situation even more. So if you really want to help, be willing to accept a bruised ego. Things will likely get messy, so take a deep breath, stay present, and remain as neutral and calm as possible. Remember, no matter what - despite the hurtful words or disrespectful behaviours that may be coming your way - that in the midst of their outburst, it's really not about you. They might be projecting their negative feelings onto you, but it's really about them dealing with overwhelming emotions. It's about them losing control and needing help to find clarity again. It's about them crying for help in a desperate way, because in that moment, they just don't know what else to do. Try to calm them down and show them that you understand what they are feeling. Try to "be on their side" as much as possible and help them to manage their raw, uncensored feelings.



5. Accept What Has Happened

Many times, when people act in ways we don't approve of, we think to ourselves something along the lines of "they SHOULD have known better than to act this way." This kind of thinking is not helpful or even true, because the fact is, they have already acted out. Despite the

judgements we often have about others, everyone is always trying to do the best they can at any given moment. If they could have acted in a more appropriate way, they would have, but they didn't. Human behaviours and emotions are complex, and very often, we are driven by unconscious drives. So focus on what is right here, right now. Help your loved one get back to a place of emotional balance, and *then* you can give consequences for the bad behaviours – but you can do this without being angry. This is no time to desert, ignore or shame the ones we love, as tempting as it might be for our egos to show them 'who's the boss.' Hopefully next time, things will be better.



6. Be a Catalyst For Healing

One of the greatest gifts you can give someone is to help them release those heavy, suppressed negative emotions that have been a burden for far too long. This emotional pain we all carry negatively affects our energy, our health, our creativity and our overall well-being. The only way to permanently release negative emotions is to face them consciously. So the next time a crisis happens under your watch, you have a choice. You can either consider it an inconvenience and a nuisance, telling your loved ones to “get their act together” and push those feelings way back down again, or you can help them heal. You can teach them how to release those feelings; you can offer them clarity and compassion; you can guide them through the discomfort so that they come out of the storm lighter and brighter. What an empowering act of Love!





Part Three:

Practical Solutions When the Steam is About To Blow

After reading parts one and two, you are likely able to answer this question: what is the best and only way to permanently release our negative emotions?

The Best Way to Deal with Negative Emotions

The answer is to face them consciously. That means fully feeling the emotions without adding more thoughts to them. It means observing and breathing out this wave of emotional energy as it passes through our body. Instead of trying to change it, attempting to escape from it, hiding it from ourselves or blaming it on external causes, we simply sit with it, surrender the uncomfortable emotions and let them go. This process of releasing can sometimes be over in just a matter of minutes, and the end result of consistently letting go of these toxic emotions will completely heal your life. It's extremely beneficial to practice this technique daily, either for minor annoyances or for deep wounds -but having access to a safe space is preferable in this case. Once the emotions have been released, it's helpful to make a conscious decision to focus on something uplifting afterwards.

The *Letting Go* Upgrade

The *letting go* technique is surprisingly simple and powerfully effective, yet we have been conditioned to follow the “seek pleasure and avoid pain at all costs” program. When we become more conscious, we discover that we have the possibility to re-write our programming. If you’re reading this, you have already been upgrading from “Survival 101” to “Thriving 007.” You rock!

The Fine Print



BUT. When deep, dark and heavy negative emotions are stirred up, practising the *letting go* technique requires a safe, intimate, space. You can imagine how awkward and inappropriate it would be to "let go" in the middle of a conference call with your colleagues, in line at the grocery store or during an exam. Maybe the day will come when the world becomes so conscious that it will be socially acceptable for everyone to practice this technique in public, but until that day comes, we also need some other, less disruptive strategies to help us deal with our darkest pain - when it shows up in public!

Socially Appropriate Substitutes

Finding a balance between the authentic *letting go* technique and a more *socially appropriate substitute* is truly an Art. How deeply will you be able to facilitate healing while at the same time remaining practical and realistic about the environment you are currently in? Sometimes, the best we can offer is a band-aid solution, a temporary fix, but if this is done consciously, then it's better than many alternatives - such as shaming our loved ones for the way they feel, or forcing them to suppress emotions. Also, when dealing with children who are not your own, it may be best to avoid diving in too deeply into the source of their pain, especially if there is a history of trauma.

So what are some *socially appropriate substitutes* to the *letting go* technique?

Physical Space

Sometimes, just having a little physical space to process discomfort can go a long way. If at all possible, allow your loved one to sit quietly in a calm and comfortable area. Let them breathe it out with their eyes closed. You can remind them to just watch what is happening inside them without resisting it, or feeding it more mental energy. Gently show your support by stating that, as uncomfortable as they might feel, negative emotions are important because they give valuable feedback. You can help them verbalize their emotions and thoughts if they are open to that.



Baby Steps

When access to a quieter space is not possible, or when it's not appropriate to fully feel and release the motherload of negative emotions, you can focus on a single aspect of what's causing the discomfort (as opposed to diving deeply into it). Try to let that single thing go and then use any of the distraction ideas below to move on. For example, if you are heartbroken about a relationship ending, pick a single thing about that person you are able to let go of (such as taking walks together at lunch time). Fully feel the pain related to that specific situation, release it, and then focus on something else.

Distractions

As most of us already know very well, distraction is our best friend when it comes to avoiding our pain. Sometimes it's OK to *consciously* choose distraction, and we can use it as a tool with our loved ones when their environment is not appropriate for deep healing. Some great distractions are: taking a break, playing a game, having a snack, engaging in some kind of physical activity, going for a walk, listening to music, having a good laugh, talking to a friend, thinking about your latest or greatest success, noticing what's right, or doing something creative.

Conclusion: Beyond Emotions

Emotions and thoughts are important, but as we raise our consciousness, we start to understand that who - or what - we are, transcends even our thoughts and emotions. Ironically, as our awareness increases and we become more detached from the thoughts and emotions we used to derive our sense of identity from, the emotions we experience become increasingly positive. Why? Because as we heal and release our negative baggage, our level of consciousness increases, and we become a match to the higher frequencies on the scale of emotions : which are all the positive emotions! Denying the presence of our negative emotions by merely *thinking positively* actually keeps us trapped in lower negative states. There is much healing to be done in this world, my friends, so now that we know how to help ourselves and others to release negative emotions, let's get started!

Thanks for reading!

Lise Villeneuve

More resources from the [Conscious Kids Mindfulness Program](#):

- A short story and fun activity that teaches kids **about the relationship between their thoughts and their feelings**: [Conscious Kids, Lesson B and Lesson C](#).
- A short story and relaxation meditation that teaches kids how to **manage their strong negative emotions**: [Conscious Kids, Lesson D](#).
- A short story and fun activity that teaches kids about **the scale of emotions and how they can self-regulate their emotions**: [Conscious Kids, Lesson E](#).
- A short story and creative activity that teaches kids about **the three reasons why their thoughts are so powerful**: [Conscious Kids, Lesson F](#).
- A short story and empowering activity that teaches kids **how to turn any negative situation into a positive affirmation**: [Conscious Kids, Lesson H](#).
- A short story and creative activity that teaches kids about **the nature of their negative emotions, as well as what triggers them**: [Conscious Kids, Lesson L](#).
- A short story and practical activity that teaches kids about **three choices they always have that allow them to keep their cool in any situation**: [Conscious Kids, Lesson M](#).
- A short story and powerful activity that teaches kids **how to release their negative feelings**: [Conscious Kids, Lesson U](#).